

The courage to believe

Nicholas King SJ

3rd Sunday of Easter: April 26

Readings: Acts 2: 14, 22-33, Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-11, 1 Peter 1:17-21, Luke 24:13-35

The readings continue the exploration of what it means that Jesus is risen; in particular, they allow us to see the courage that it brings.

The **first reading**, from Acts, of course, gives us Peter's speech on Pentecost Sunday. He "stood up with the Eleven" (a reminder, of course, that the Church has been broken since its very beginning; they should be Twelve, but Judas has gone another way). Peter shows quite remarkable bravery, considering that virtually the last time we saw him, he was denying, with the most terrible oaths, that he had ever even heard of Jesus.

Now he is speaking the brave truth on a large stage: "Men of Judah, and all you who live in Jerusalem!" Not only that, but he is challenging his hearers, claiming that they "know that Jesus the Nazarene was a man marked out from God to you, with miracles and portents and signs which God did through him in your midst". And he has the courage to accuse them of murder: "You destroyed him, who had been handed over through the hands of lawless people, crucifying him."

Then he makes the all-important claim: "God raised him up, undoing the agonies of death; because it was impossible for Jesus to be held by Death." After this he produces a quotation from David (traditionally the psalmist); and argues that "it is possible for me to speak courageously to you about the Patriarch, that he died and had been buried", which proves that when the psalm speaks of "my Lord", "he foresaw and spoke about the Resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see destruction". On the contrary: "This was the Jesus whom God raised from the dead—and we are all his witnesses." There is immense Easter courage here.

The same confidence is detectable in the **psalm**: "Keep me safe, O God, because I have taken refuge in you...my portion and cup." There is quiet courage: "I shall bless the Lord, because he gives me counsel...I keep the Lord always in my sight." And there is joy here, too: "Therefore my heart rejoices, and my body is glad, and even my flesh shall be secure." The source for this courage is that God is incapable of letting us down: "For you will not leave my soul for Sheol...you will teach me the path of life."

Now look at the **second reading**, continuing our Easter journey through 1 Peter: "Be aware that you were ransomed from your useless way of life, handed down by the ancestors, not by perishables like silver or gold, but by the precious blood of a spotless and unblemished lamb, who had been known about before the creation of the world, but revealed at the end of days on your account...[you] who believe in God who raised him from the dead...so that your faith and hope are in God."

This takes us to the **Gospel**, a story of how two of Jesus' disillusioned disciples are brought from despair to courage. It is one of the loveliest Resurrection narratives and starts with Cleopas and his unnamed partner (Mrs Cleopas?) trudging from Jerusalem to Emmaus, convinced they have lost Jesus forever. Unrecognised by them (and often by us), he entices from them the story of their disappointment; and when he asks what they are talking about, they "stopped, with long faces", and interrogate him: "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" We are allowed a wry smile: the one they address is actually the only person in Jerusalem who does know what has been going on.

So, laboriously, they tell the tale of Jesus who looked as though he might be a prophet, and what the "high priests and rulers" did to him ("and we had been hoping that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel"). Not only that, but it turns out these disillusioned ex-believers actually had all the evidence in their grasp, because "some women from among us have amazed us"; they had found the tomb empty, and seen angels ("but you can't believe what women say!").

Then Jesus restores their courage, by simply preaching a sermon, on how "Moses and all the prophets" had predicted this. Warmed by this, they beg the stranger to stay with them. Astonishingly, he breaks bread for them—and disappears! But it does not matter, for they have been given precious courage by the encounter; and they go roaring back to Jerusalem, even though they had just been saying how late it was; and there they find that it is all true. Suddenly they have all their courage back.

What about you, this **Easter season**?

HOW CAN I HELP TO SUPPORT THE SOUTHERN CROSS

See following page ...

The Southern Cross is entirely independent and unsubsidised, surviving on revenue from sales and advertising — and the kind support of our readers.

The Southern Cross has survived for nearly 100 years on the strength of tight financial management and the great sacrifices by its small, loyal staff. But now the survival of our only national Catholic weekly is in great danger. The closure of our churches in the national lockdown has robbed us of our main source of income: sales at the church door.

We have made the weekly edition available for FREE on our website, going online every Friday at noon. That way, all Catholics will have access to the Catholic weekly.

Subscribers get their edition on Wednesdays, with premium content for the duration of the lockdown. We are asking those who take up our offer of the free newspaper to make a donation, or to subscribe. An encouraging number of people have already done so.

We remain positive that by God's grace we can survive this crisis. But that also requires YOUR help.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

1. Subscribe and encourage people to subscribe to The Southern Cross. Go to digital.scross.co.za/subscribe or subscriptions@scross.co.za
2. If you run a business, advertising in The Southern Cross is a great way of supporting us. It could turn out to be a great commercial decision, as many advertisers have found. Contact Yolanda at advertising@scross.co.za
3. Support our Associates' Campaign which helps us build up reserves and to undertake important outreach work. Go to digital.scross.co.za/associatescampaign for details
4. Make an EFT contribution into the account: The Southern Cross, Standard Bank, Thibault Square Branch (Code0 20909), Acc No: 276876016. Please e-mail or fax payment details and your name and contact details to admin@scross.co.za or 021 465-3850.

We depend on YOU to keep our national Catholic weekly alive. Thank you for your generous help!